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ABSTRACT

A variety of strategies and methods are available to supervisors for use with counselors whom they supervise. This digest provides a summary designed to acquaint supervisors with techniques for enhancing the counseling behavior of their supervisees while also considering individual learning characteristics as depicted by the supervisee's developmental level. The use of strategies examining a supervisee's counseling behavior with current clients allows the supervisor to correct any error in assessment, diagnosis, or treatment of the client. The digest discusses methods of improving clinical competence and stresses the importance of examining actual counselor-client interactions. Methods of achieving this are explored, including the use of audio- and video-tapes of sessions and live supervision using television or one-way mirrors. A number of developmental considerations, depending on what works best for a particular supervisee, are addressed. Contains 7 references. (NB)

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ERIC CLEARINGHOUSE ON Counseling And Student Services

ERIC DIGEST

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Strategies and Methods of Effective Supervision

Gordon M. Hart

A variety of strategies and methods are available to supervisors for use with counselors whom they supervise. This summary is designed to acquaint supervisors with techniques for enhancing the counseling behavior of their supervisees while also considering individual learning characteristics as depicted by the supervisee's developmental level.

To improve a supervisee's skills in working with clients, some form of assessment must be done while counseling is taking place (rather than with clients who have terminated). Using strategies that examine a supervisee's counseling behavior with current clients allows a supervisor to correct any error in assessment, diagnosis, or treatment of the client, and thus increases the probability of a successful outcome.

Methods of Improving Clinical (Counseling) Competence

Whether the supervisor's purpose is to improve a supervisee's skills or to ensure accuracy, actual counselor-client interaction must be examined (Hart, 1982). Although the traditional method of counselor self-report is often used, this form of data-gathering is notoriously inaccurate. The more reliable forms of data-gathering are review of a client's case history; review of results of current psychodiagnostic testing, including a structured interview (such as a mental status exam); and, particularly, examination of the counselor-client sessions via methods such as audiotape, videotape, and observation through a one-way mirror or sitting in the sessions (Borders & Leddick, 1987).

Of the methods for reviewing counselor-client sessions, the use of live supervision (observation via television or one-way mirror) provides an opportunity to give a supervisee immediate corrective feedback about a particular counseling technique and to see how well the counselor can carry out a suggested strategy. Live supervision is effective for learning new techniques, learning new modalities (e.g., family counseling), and gaining skills with types of clients with whom the counselor is unfamiliar (West, Bubenzer, Pinsoneault, & Holeman, 1993). A live supervision strategy can be supplemented by review of a session immediately following the session or delayed a day or more.

Supervision conducted immediately following a counseling session or delayed a day or two could use an audiotape or videotape of the counseling session or use non-recorded observation through a one-way mirror or television system. Supervisors are advised to review audio or videotapes of a supervisee's counseling session prior to the supervision session in order to plan a strategy of intervention. The supervisee also should review the tape to prepare questions and discussion topics.

In immediate and delayed supervision sessions, the supervisor should focus on what the supervisee wanted to do with the client, what he/she said or did, and what he/she would like to do in future counseling sessions. Regardless of when the review of the counseling session is conducted (live, immediate, or delayed), the supervisor will have examined an actual work sample of the supervisee and no longer must rely solely on self-report. This examination is likely to aid in the supervisor's credibility in reporting on a supervisee's competence to school or agency administrators regarding retention or promotion, to state licensing officials, or to courts, should that be necessary.

Developmental Considerations

Although group and peer supervision are powerful approaches (Hart, 1982), individual supervision is likely to be the main form of reviewing supervisee performance (Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). When using individual supervision, a supervisor must consider most carefully the developmental level of the supervisee (Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987). Specifically, how skilled is the supervisee in general and specifically with the type of client in question, how anxious is the supervisee when reviewing his/her work, and what is the supervisee's learning style? Although these factors may vary somewhat independently, it is likely that less skilled counselors will be somewhat anxious. Additionally, developmental level has been conceptualized as cognitive or conceptual level and has been associated with challenging a supervisee to grasp increasingly more sophisticated concepts.

With novice supervisees, a high degree of support and a low amount of challenge or confrontation is advisable (Howard, Nance, & Myers, 1986). When learning style is considered, a micro-training approach focusing on specific skills might be used, demonstrated by the supervisor, and then practiced in the supervision session by the supervisee in a role-play. However, some novice or anxious supervisees learn best by a macro approach; that is, having a clear overview of the goals of the session, expected role of the counselor, client typology, and specific client characteristics such as race, gender, culture, socioeconomic status, family background, and personal-

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ity characteristics. For these supervisees, use of written case study materials or an IPR (Interpersonal Process Recall) approach (Kagan 1980) might be better than a micro-training approach.

With more competent supervisees, the focus may be placed on more advanced skills or on more complex client issues. Either a micro or macro approach may be used. Using videotape is suggested for these supervisees, as they are more likely to be able to assimilate the larger amount of data provided by videotape compared to that provided by audiotapes, which are suggested for use with less competent supervisees.

With more skilled and more confident supervisees, exploration of issues usually found to be threatening also may be examined. Such issues include relationship of theoretical orientation to technique employed, personal style, counselor feelings about the client, and learning new and innovative techniques or modalities (individual, group, or family counseling).

Developmentally, a supervisor should expect that supervisees progress to more independent functioning whereby supervisees pick the clients and client issues which they wish to review as well as the personal issues or client dynamics they wish to examine. Audio or videotape segments can be selected for review rather than listening to entire tapes. At this more advanced stage of supervision, the supervisor may feel more like a colleague or a consultant than a teacher, which allows the supervisor to share more examples of his/her own counseling experience conveyed either through self report or via audiotapes (Hart, 1982). With more skilled and confident supervisees, collaboration such as co-leading a group or co-counseling with a family can be conducted. Although such collaboration strategies have been advocated for novice counselors, maximum benefit more likely may be achieved by supervisees who are more confident in their skills and who have developed basic skills sufficiently to be able to perceive and learn the complex skills that a supervisor is likely to use when working with a group or family.

Summary

Supervision for the clinical/counseling functions of counsel in schools and agencies should focus on actual work samples. Usi a micro-training versus a more macro approach should depend what works best for a particular supervisee, along with t supervisee's level of skill and confidence.

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